


Second Punic War

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The **Second Punic War** (referred to as "**The War Against Hannibal**" by the Romans) lasted from 218 to 201 BC and involved combatants in the western and eastern Mediterranean. It was the second of three major wars between Carthage and the Roman Republic. They are called the "Punic Wars" because Rome's name for Carthaginians was *Punici* (older *Poenici*, due to their Phoenician ancestry. In modern historiography "Punic" is used to make a distinction between Phoenicians and the people of Carthaginian origin.)

The war is marked by Hannibal's surprising overland journey and his costly crossing of the Alps, followed by his reinforcement by Gaulish allies and crushing victories over Roman armies in the battle of the Trebia and the giant ambush at Trasimene. Against his skill on the battlefield the Romans deployed the Fabian strategy. But because of the increasing unpopularity of this approach, the Romans nevertheless resorted to a further major field battle. The result was the Roman defeat at Cannae. In consequence many Roman allies went over to Carthage, prolonging the war in Italy for over a decade, during which more Roman armies were destroyed on the battlefield. Despite these setbacks, the Roman forces were more capable in siegecraft than the Carthaginians and recaptured all the major cities that had joined the enemy, as well as defeating a Carthaginian attempt to reinforce Hannibal at the battle of the Metaurus. In the meantime in Iberia, which served as the main source of manpower for the Carthaginian army, a second Roman expedition under Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus Major took New Carthage by assault and ended Carthaginian rule over Iberia in the battle of Ilipa. The final showdown was the battle of Zama in Africa between Scipio Africanus and Hannibal, resulting in the latter's defeat and the imposition of harsh peace conditions on Carthage, which ceased to be a

Second Punic War	
Part of the Punic Wars	
	
Borders of Roman and Punic zone of influence in 218 BC, just prior to the war	
Date	218 to 201 BC
Location	Italia, Sicily, Hispania, Cisalpine Gaul, Transalpine Gaul, Africa, Greece
Result	Decisive Roman victory, Rome gains absolute domination of the western Mediterranean
Territorial changes	Rome gets foothold in Iberia and the Balearic Islands, Punic Africa becomes client of Rome, Numidia becomes united
Belligerents	
Roman Republic	Carthage
Aetolian League	Syracuse
Pergamon	Macedon
Commanders	
Publius Cornelius Scipio†, Tiberius Sempronius Longus	Hannibal, son of Hamilcar Barca, Hasdrubal, son of Hamilcar Barca†, Mago, son of Hamilcar Barca†, Hasdrubal Gisco†, Syphax,
Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus, Gaius Flaminius†, Fabius Maximus, Claudius Marcellus†, Lucius Aemilius Paullus†, Gaius Terentius Varro, Marcus Livius Salinator,	Hanno the Elder†, Hasdrubal the Bald, Hampsicora†, Maharbal

major power and became a Roman client-state.

A sideshow of this war was the indecisive first Macedonian War in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Ionian Sea.

All battles mentioned in the introduction are ranked among the most costly traditional battles of human history; in addition there were a few successful ambushes of armies that also ended in their annihilation.

Gaius Claudius Nero,
Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio
Calvus†,
Masinissa,
Minucius†,
Gnaeus Servilius
Geminus†

Contents

- 1 Events leading to the war
- 2 Hannibal takes the initiative (218 BC - 213 BC)
 - 2.1 Western Mediterranean (218 BC - 213 BC)
 - 2.1.1 Hannibal's overland journey
 - 2.1.2 First Roman expedition to Iberia
 - 2.2 Central Mediterranean (218 BC - 213 BC)
 - 2.2.1 Naval raids and expeditions
 - 2.2.2 Gallic uprising
 - 2.2.3 Fabian Strategy
 - 2.2.4 Seeking a decisive engagement
 - 2.2.5 Establishing an allied base
 - 2.3 Eastern Mediterranean and Ionian Sea (218 BC - 213 BC)
- 3 Rome takes key cities (212 BC - 207 BC)
 - 3.1 Western Mediterranean(212 BC - 207 BC)
 - 3.1.1 Defeat of the first expedition
 - 3.1.2 Second Roman expedition to Iberia
 - 3.2 Central Mediterranean (212 BC - 207 BC)
 - 3.2.1 Climax and fall of Hannibal's alliance



External images



Map of Roman and Carthaginian maximum expansion
(http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/firsteuro/imgs/map7.html)^[1]

- 3.2.2 Hasdrubal's failed reinforcement
 - 3.2.3 Naval raids and expeditions
- 3.3 Eastern Mediterranean and Ionian Sea (212 BC - 207 BC)
- 4 Seeking peace (206 BC - 201 BC)
 - 4.1 Western Mediterranean(206 BC - 201 BC)
 - 4.1.1 Carthage's last stand in Iberia
 - 4.1.2 The Numidian struggle
 - 4.2 Central Mediterranean(206 BC - 201 BC)
 - 4.2.1 Last stands in Italy
 - 4.2.2 Carrying the war to Africa
 - 4.2.3 Broken armistice and final peace treaty
 - 4.3 Eastern Mediterranean and Ionian Sea (206 BC - 201 BC)
- 5 Rome and Carthage after the war
- 6 Carthage and Numidia after the war
- 7 Primary sources
- 8 See also
- 9 References
 - 9.1 Notes
- 10 External links

Events leading to the war

The Second Punic War between Carthage and Rome was ignited by the dispute over the hegemony of Saguntum, a hellenized Iberian coastal city with diplomatic contacts with Rome. After great tension within the city government culminating in the assassination of the supporters of Carthage, Hannibal laid siege to the city of Sagunt in 218 BC. The city called for Roman aid, but the pleas fell on deaf ears. Following a prolonged siege and a bloody struggle in which Hannibal himself was wounded and the army practically destroyed, the Carthaginians finally took control of the city. Many of the Saguntians chose to commit suicide rather than face the subjugation by the Carthaginians.

Hannibal takes the initiative (218 BC - 213 BC)

Western Mediterranean (218 BC - 213 BC)

Hannibal's overland journey

The Carthaginian army in Iberia, excluding the forces in Africa, totaled 90,000 infantry, 12,000 cavalry and an unknown number of war elephants and was thus one of the largest in the

Route of Hannibal's invasion of Italy

Hellenistic world and equal in numbers to any that the Romans had yet fielded. Hannibal's expeditionary force numbered as many as 75,000 foot soldiers and 9,000 horsemen, including 36 war elephants. Hannibal departed with this army from New Carthage northwards along the coast in late spring of 218 B.C. At the Ebro he split the army into three columns and subdued the tribes from there to the Pyrenees within weeks, but with severe losses. At the Pyrenees, he left a detachment of 11,000 Iberian troops, who showed reluctance to leave their homeland, to garrison the newly conquered region. Hannibal reportedly entered Gaul with 50,000 infantry and 9,000 cavalry. He took his army by an inland route, avoiding the Roman allies along the coast. In Gaul negotiations helped him to move unmolested except for the Battle of Rhone Crossing where a force of the Allobroges unsuccessfully tried to oppose his 38,000 infantry (that number may exclude light infantry), 8,000 cavalry, and 37 war elephants from the other shore.^[2]

In the meantime, a Roman fleet with an invasion force was underway to northern Iberia. Its commanders, the brothers Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Calvus and Publius Cornelius Scipio, knew that Hannibal had crossed the Ebro, but were surprised by the Carthaginian army's presence at the Rhone upstream of their ally Massalia, where they had landed. A scouting party of 300 cavalry was sent to discover the whereabouts of the enemy. These eventually defeated a Carthaginian scouting troop of 500 mounted Numidians and chased them back to their main camp. Thus, with knowledge of the location of the enemy, the Romans marched upstream, ready for battle. Hannibal evaded this force and by an unknown route reached (the Isere or the Durance) the foot of the Alps in autumn. He also received messengers from his Gaulish allies in Italy that urged him to come to their aid and offered to guide him over the Alps. Before setting out to cross the Alps, he was re-supplied by a native tribe which he had helped solve some hereditary disputes.

First Roman expedition to Iberia

The first Roman expedition to Iberia was unable to bring the Carthaginian troops in the hinterland of Massalia to a pitched battle, so it continued on its way to northern Iberia under Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Calvus, a move which was to prove decisive for the outcome of the war. Their other commander, Publius Cornelius Scipio, returned to Rome, realizing the danger of an invasion of Italy where the tribes of the Boii and Insubres were already in revolt. After 217 BC he also traveled to Spain.

In Iberia, Carthaginian rule was not popular, but Roman inaction during the siege of Saguntum had made the natives cautious about an alliance against their masters. Gnaeus Cornelius Scipio Calvus established his headquarters at Cissa in the midst of Hannibal's latest acquisition, the area between Ebro and Pyrenees. Despite initial setbacks, he was winning increasing support among the natives. This convinced the Carthaginian commander Hanno, the nephew of Hannibal, to accept pitched battle before his troops had been united with the army under Hasdrubal, the brother of Hannibal, despite being outnumbered 2 to 1. The result was a Roman victory in the battle of Cissa in 218 BC. When Hasdrubal finally made it to the scene, he was in no position to fight the Roman army and merely caught their navy personnel off-guard, killing some of them in the process.

The combined Roman and Massalian fleet and army posed a threat to the Carthaginians. Hasdrubal intended to first defeat the fleet. However, his naval forces had a history of failure against the Romans. They had lost all but one major naval engagement in the First Punic War and in 218 BC a naval engagement in the waters of Lilybaeum had been lost despite numerical superiority. For this reason he moved the army and fleet together. The fleet is described as being very disorganized prior to the battle. The army in the meantime provided loud moral support and a safe harbour for the ensuing naval battle of the Ebro River. The 40 Carthaginian and Iberian vessels were severely defeated by the 55 Roman and Massalian ships in the second naval engagement of the war with about 3/4 of the fleet captured or sunk and the rest beaching their ships with the army on the shore. In the aftermath the Carthaginian forces retreated, but the Romans were still confined to the area between Ebro and Pyrenees.

This position prevented the Carthaginians from sending reinforcements from Iberia to Hannibal or to the insurgent Gauls in northern Italy during critical stages of the war. To deal with this problem, in 215 BC Hasdrubal marched into Roman territory and offered battle at Dertosa. In this battle he used his cavalry superiority to clear the field and to envelop the enemy on both sides with his infantry, a tactic that had been very successfully employed in Italy. But the Romans broke through the thinned out line in the centre and defeated both wings separately, inflicting severe losses; not without, however, taking heavy losses themselves.

While little progress was made in the Iberian theatre, the Scipios were able to negotiate a new front in Africa by allying themselves with Syphax, a powerful Numidian king in North Africa. In 213 BC



Iberian warrior from bas-relief ca. 200 BC. The warrior is armed with a falcata and an oval shield. Iberian tribes fought for both sides in the 2nd Punic War, but in reality most wanted to be rid of all foreign domination. National Archaeological Museum of Spain, Madrid



Iberian falcata, 4th/3rd century BC. This weapon, a scythe-shaped sword, was unique to Iberia. By its inherent weight distribution, it could deliver blows as powerful as an axe. The Iberians made some of the best weapons of the ancient world: they invented the *gladius*, the standard sword used by Roman infantry. National Archaeological Museum of Spain, Madrid

he received Roman advisers to train his heavy infantry soldiers that had not yet been able to stand up to their Carthaginian counterparts. With this support he waged war against the Carthaginian ally Gaia. According to Appian, in 213 BC Hasdrubal left Iberia and fought Syphax, though he may be confused with Hasdrubal Gisco, however, it did bind Carthaginian resources.^[3] Hasdrubal Gisco is the son of the Gisco who had served together with Hamilcar Barca, Hannibal's father, in Sicily during the First Punic War and son-in-law of Hanno the Elder who was one of Hannibal's lieutenants in Italy.

Central Mediterranean (218 BC - 213 BC)

Naval raids and expeditions

In 218 BC the Carthaginian navy was busy scouting the Sicilian waters and preparing for a surprise attack on their former key stronghold Lilybaeum on the western tip of the island. 20 quinqueremes, loaded with 1,000 soldiers, raided the Aegadian Islands west of Sicily and 8 ships intended to attack the Vulcan islands, but were blown off-course in a storm towards the Straits of Messina. The Syracusan navy, then at Messina, managed to capture three of these ships without resistance. Learning from their crews that a Carthaginian fleet was to attack Lilybaeum, Hiero II warned the Roman praetor Marcus Amellius there. As a result the Romans prepared 20 quinquiremes to intercept, and defeated the 35 Carthaginian quinquiremes in the battle of Lilybaeum, the first naval engagement of the war.

In 218 BC preparations were made to launch a Roman expedition from the same Lilybaeum against Africa. Hannibal had anticipated the move and reinforced the defending army in Africa with 13,850 Iberian heavy infantry, 870 Balearic slingers and 1200 Iberian cavalry. In addition, some 4000 Iberian men *of good family were called up who were under orders to be conveyed to Carthage to strengthen its defence, and also to serve as hostages for the loyalty of their people.*^[4] In return, 11,850 Libyan infantry, 300 Ligurians, and 500 Balearics were sent to Iberia to strengthen the local defence against the other anticipated Roman invasion.^[5]



Roman coin struck in 215-212 BC, during Hannibal's invasion of Italy. Obverse side shows Hercules wearing a lion skin. Reverse shows the prow of a warship, a standard motif in Republican coins and legend ROMA. Compared to the wellcrafted coins of the Greek cities of southern Italy, Roman coins at this time were crude.
Bronze *quadrans*

The Carthaginian navy had been defeated in two major encounters by the Romans, but neither side was usually able to interdict the other from raiding each other's coasts. An exception was in 217 BC when a Carthaginian fleet of 70 quinquiremes was intercepted off the coast of Etruria by a Roman fleet of 120 quinquiremes and retreated without giving battle.

The first Carthaginian expedition to Sardinia in 215 BC was under the command of Hasdrubal The Bald with his subordinate Hampsicora. A previous pro-Carthaginian uprising had been defeated while a storm had blown the Carthaginian fleet to the Balearic Islands. When they finally made it to Sardinia, the Romans were aware of their intentions and had reinforced the unpopular garrison under Titus Manlius Torquatus to 20,000 infantry and 1,200 cavalry. These engaged and defeated the Carthaginians' 15,000 infantry and 1,500 cavalry (plus an unknown number of elephants) and the remaining insurgent Sardinians at the Battle of Cornus. In the aftermath the defeated expedition of 60 quinquiremes and several transports encountered a Roman raiding party from Africa with 100 quinquiremes. The Carthaginian fleet scattered and escaped save for 7 ships. As a result Sardinia, an

important grain exporter, remained under Roman occupation.

Gallic uprising

The Romans simultaneously received news of Hannibal's crossing of the Ebro and of an uprising in northern Italy of the Gallic tribes Boii and Insubres.^[6] These had established diplomatic contact with the Carthaginians and joined them as allies against their common enemy, Rome. The first objective of the insurgents were the Roman colonies of Placentia and Cremona, causing the Romans to flee to Mutina, which the Gauls then besieged. In response, Praetor L. Manlius Vulso marched with 2 Roman legions and allies, 1,600 cavalry and 20,000 infantry, to Cisalpine Gaul. This army was ambushed twice on the way from Ariminum, lost 1,200 men, and although the siege of Mutina was raised, this army itself fell under a loose siege a few miles from Mutina.^[7] This event prompted the Roman Senate to send one of Scipio's legions and 5,000 allied troops to aid Vulso. Scipio had to raise troops to replace these and thus could not set out for Iberia until September of 218 BC, thus giving Hannibal time to march from the Ebro to the Rhone.



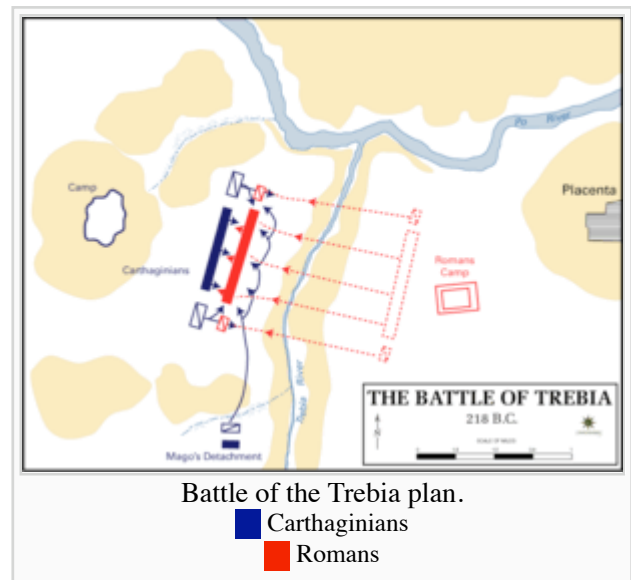
Carthaginian coin showing (obverse) a deity or hero, probably Melqart assimilated to Hercules (hence club). Dated 221-218 BC, it is believed to be a portrait of Hannibal or (posthumously) of his father Hamilcar. On reverse, image of an African war elephant (*Loxodonta cyclotis*). Silver double shekel. British Museum, London

After evading a pitched battle at the Rhone, Hannibal came to the aid of his Gallic allies, who were hard pressed by the Roman reinforcements. He crossed the Alps, surmounting the difficulties of climate and terrain, and the guerrilla tactics of the native tribes. His exact route is disputed. Hannibal arrived with at least 28,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry and 30 elephants in the territory of the Taurini in Italy. His crossing was expected by the enemy, but not such an early arrival, while the Roman forces were still in their winter quarters.^[8] This crossing is usually credited as a great achievement since no army before had crossed the Alps in winter with elephants and it led to the termination of Rome's main intended thrust, an invasion of Africa.

The Gauls of the lower Po Valley, Hannibal's allies, were still far away. Hannibal was first obliged to fight with his currently reduced force to be able to reach them and to incite the rest of Gallia Cisalpina to revolt. His first action was to take the chief city of the hostile Taurini. Afterwards the Carthaginians were intercepted by a newly raised Roman force under Publius Cornelius Scipio, whom Hannibal had evaded earlier in the Rhone Valley, and who had not anticipated such an early arrival on the other side of the Alps. In the ensuing Battle of Ticinus the cavalry forces of Hannibal's army defeated the cavalry and light infantry of the Romans in a minor engagement. Scipio, severely injured in the battle, retreated across the River Trebia with his heavy infantry still intact, and encamped at the town of Placentia to await reinforcements. As a result of Rome's defeat at the Ticinus, all the Gauls except the Cenomani were induced to join the Carthaginian cause. Soon the entire north of Italy was unofficially insurgent, with both Gallic and Ligurian troops bolstering Hannibal's army back to at least 40,000 men.

Even before news of the defeat at the Ticinus River reached Rome, the Senate had ordered the consul Sempronius Longus to bring his army back from Sicily, where it had been preparing for the invasion of Africa, to join Scipio and face Hannibal. The latter was blocking Sempronius' way to Scipio's army. But the Carthaginian capture of the supply depot at Clastidium, through the treachery of the local Latin commander, served as a diversion and allowed Sempronius' army to slip through to Scipio, who was still too seriously injured to take the field. After some minor successes, the united and numerically equal Roman force under the command of Sempronius Longus was lured by Hannibal into combat at the battle of the Trebia.

The Roman troops were drawn into the engagement without breakfast and had to first cross a cold river, preventing many from putting up much of a fight. Furthermore, a hidden detachment led by Hannibal's younger brother Mago attacked them from the rear. All in all, the Romans suffered heavy losses with only 20,000 men out of 40,000 able to retreat to safety. They left Cisalpine Gaul in the aftermath. Having secured his position in northern Italy by this victory, Hannibal quartered his troops for the winter amongst the Gauls. The latter joined his army in large numbers, bringing it up to 60,000 men, but the Carthaginians living on their land reduced their enthusiasm.

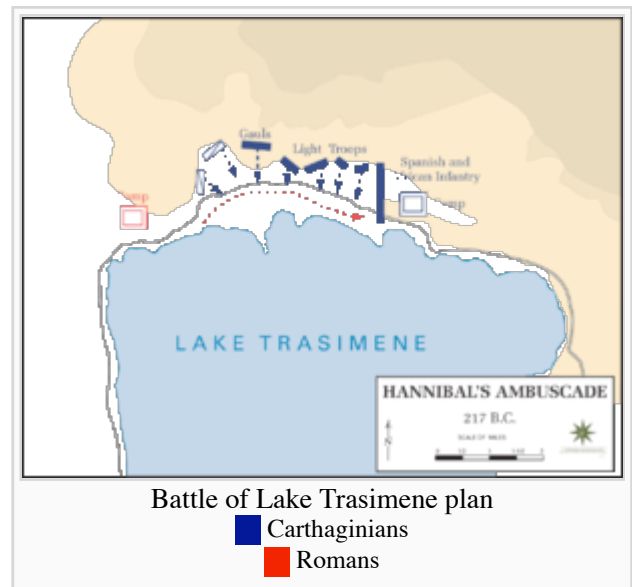


The Roman Senate resolved to raise new armies against Hannibal under the recently-elected consuls of 217 B.C., Gnaeus Servilius Geminus and Gaius Flaminius. The latter had long distrusted his fellow senators and feared they would try to sabotage his command by finding excuses to delay his departure. So he quietly left Rome to take over his army at Ariminum without performing the lengthy religious rituals required of an incoming consul.^[9] The Senate voted unanimously to recall him but he ignored its orders. This caused widespread dismay among the Romans, who feared that Flaminius' disrespect for the gods would bring disaster on Rome. As it was expected that Hannibal would advance into central Italy, Flaminius moved his army from Ariminum to Arretium, to cover the Apennine mountain passes into Etruria. His colleague Servilius, who had performed the proper rituals and was therefore well behind Flaminius, replaced him with his freshly-raised army at Ariminum to cover the route along the Adriatic coast. A third force, containing the survivors of previous engagements, was also stationed in Etruria under Scipio. Thus the both the eastern and western routes to Rome appeared guarded.

In early spring 217 BC Hannibal decided to advance, leaving his wavering Gallic allies in the Po Valley and crossing the Apennines unopposed. Afterwards he avoided the Roman positions and took the only unguarded route into Etruria at the mouth of the Arno. This route was through a huge marsh which happened to be more flooded than usual for spring. Hannibal's army marched for several days without finding convenient places to rest, suffering terribly from fatigue and lack of sleep. This led to the loss of part of the force, including, it seems, the few remaining elephants.

Arriving in Etruria still in the spring of 217 BC, Hannibal tried without success to draw the main Roman army under Flaminius into a pitched

battle by devastating the area the latter had been sent to protect.^[10] Then a new stratagem was employed by Hannibal who marched around his opponent's left flank and effectively cut him off from Rome. Advancing through the uplands of Etruria, the Carthaginian now provoked Flaminius into a hasty pursuit without proper reconnaissance. Then, in a defile on the shore of Lake Trasimene, Hannibal lay in ambush with his army. The ambush was a complete success: in the battle of Lake Trasimene Hannibal destroyed most of the Roman army and killed Flaminius with little loss to his own army. 6,000 Romans had been able to escape, but were caught and forced to surrender by Maharbal's Numidians. Furthermore, Scipio, aware of the fighting, sent his cavalry in support but it was also caught and annihilated. As a result of this victory, the heterogeneous force of insurgent Gauls, Africans, Iberians and Numidians had more military equipment than they could use themselves and sold the surplus via Egyptian traders to the Romans. As after all previous engagements the captured enemies were sorted according to whether they were Romans, who were held captive, or non-Romans, who were released to spread the propaganda that the Carthaginian army was in Italy to fight for their freedom against the Romans. Strategically, Hannibal had now disposed of the only field force which could check his advance upon Rome, but despite the urgings of his generals, did not proceed to attack Rome. Instead he marched to the south in the hope of winning over allies amongst the Greek and Italic population there.



Fabian Strategy

The defeat at Lake Trasimene put the Romans in an immense state of panic, fearing for the very existence of their city. The Senate decided to resort to the traditional emergency measure of appointing a *dictator*, a temporary commander-in-chief who would unite military authority, which was normally divided between the two consuls, under one head for six months. The usual procedure required the presence of a consul to appoint the *dictator*. Since one consul (Flaminius) was dead and the other (Servilius) away with the only army left in Italy, the Senate resolved to elect a dictator itself. As this was unconstitutional, the person appointed, Quintus Fabius Maximus, was given the title of *prodictator* (acting dictator) although he held the same powers as a dictator. The Senate also appointed his *magister equitum* ("master of cavalry", who acted as his second-in-command) instead of allowing the dictator to choose one himself as was the normal rule: M. Minucius Rufus.^[12]



Detail of frieze showing the equipment of a soldier in the manipular Roman legion (left). Note mail armour, oval shield and helmet with plume (probably horsehair). The soldier at centre is an officer (bronze cuirass, mantle), prob. a *tribunus militum*.^[11] From an altar built by Gnaeus Domitius Ahenobarbus, consul in 122 BC. Musée du Louvre, Paris

Departing from the Roman military tradition of engaging the enemy in pitched battle as soon as possible, Fabius invented the Fabian strategy: refusing open battle with his opponent, but constantly skirmishing with small detachments of the enemy. This course was not popular among the soldiers, earning Fabius the nickname Cunctator ("delayer"), since he seemed to avoid battle while Italy was being ravaged by the enemy. Moreover, it was widely feared that, if Hannibal continued to plunder Italy unopposed, the terrified allies, believing that Rome was incapable of protecting them, might defect and pledge their allegiance to the Carthaginians. As a countermeasure, residents of villages were encouraged to post lookouts, so that they could gather their livestock and possessions in time and take refuge in fortified towns which the enemy could not yet take. Fabius' policy was to shadow Hannibal by moving on the heights parallel to the Carthaginian movements on the plains, to avoid Hannibal's cavalry which was supreme on flat terrain. This demanded great care since the Carthaginian tried with all his skill to ambush the Romans. For this reason a new marching formation with three parallel columns of infantry was developed instead of the single column that had been in use at Lake Trasimene.



Roman coin issued during the Second Punic war showing (obverse) the god of war Mars and (reverse) a very rare image of a Roman cavalryman of the time. Note plumed helmet, long spear (*hasta*), small round shield, flowing mantle. Roman cavalry was levied from the *equites*, or noble knights, until the early 1st century BC. Bronze *quincunx* from Larinum mint

Fabius' constant harassment of Hannibal's force handicapped the latter's command abilities and gained many prisoners. Both commanders decided that they would exchange prisoners under the same conditions as in the First Punic War. Although the Carthaginians returned to the Romans several hundred more prisoners than they received and were thus expecting monetary compensation, the Senate was reluctant to pay. However, the estates of Fabius had not been touched by the Carthaginian pillage parties in order to incite distrust against him. Fabius now sold these estates to pay the enemy army for the received surplus of prisoners.

Having ravaged Apulia without provoking Fabius into a battle, Hannibal decided to march through Samnium to Campania, one of the richest and most fertile provinces of Italy, hoping that the devastation would draw Fabius into battle. The latter was aware that there were excellent opportunities to trap the Carthaginian force on the Campanian plain and to force Hannibal to fight in

the surrounding mountains on ground of his own choice. As the year wore on, Hannibal decided that it would be unwise to winter in the already devastated plains of Campania but Fabius had ensured that all the mountain passes offering an exit were blocked. This situation led to the night battle of Ager Falernus in which the Carthaginians made good their escape by tricking the Romans into believing that they were heading to the heights above them. The Romans were thus decoyed and the Carthaginians slipped through the undefended pass with all their baggage train. This was a severe blow to Fabius' prestige.

Minucius, the *magister equitum*, was one of the leading voices in the army against the adoption of the Fabian Strategy. As soon as he scored a minor success by winning a skirmish with the Carthaginians, the Senate promoted Minucius to the same *imperium* (power of command) as Fabius, whom he accused of cowardice. In consequence the two men decided to split the army between them. Minucius with his division was swiftly lured by Hannibal into an ambush in the flat country of Geronium. Fabius Maximus rushed to his co-commander's assistance and Hannibal's forces immediately retreated. Subsequently Minucius accepted Fabius' authority and ended their political conflict.

Seeking a decisive engagement

Fabius became unpopular in Rome, since his tactics did not lead to a quick end to the war. The Roman populace derided the *Cunctator*, and at the elections of 216 BC elected as consuls Caius Terentius Varro and Lucius Aemilius Paullus, both of whom advocated pursuing a much more aggressive war strategy.

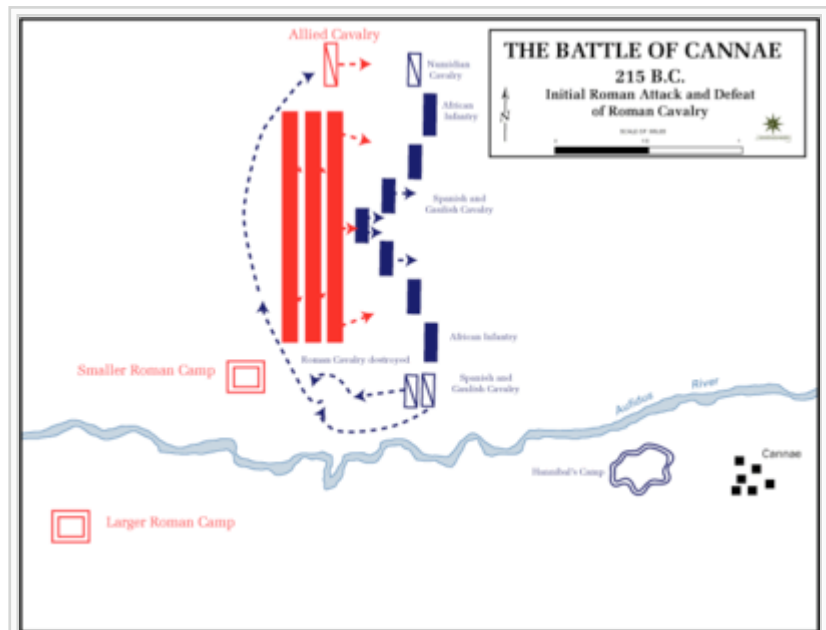
In the campaign of 217 BC Hannibal had failed to obtain a following among the Italics; in the following year he had an opportunity to turn the tide in his favour. In the spring of 216 B.C., Hannibal took the initiative and seized the large supply depot at Cannae in the Apulian plain. Thus, by seizing Cannae, Hannibal had placed himself between the Romans and their crucial source of supply. The Roman Senate authorised the raising of double-sized armies by consuls Varro and Aemilius Paullus. By some estimates, the Romans raised a force as large as 100,000 men, though this figure cannot be completely validated.

Consuls Aemilius Paulus and Varro resolved to confront Hannibal and marched southward to Apulia. After a two days' march, they found him on the left bank of the Aufidus River, and encamped six miles away. Hannibal capitalized on Varro's eagerness and drew him into a trap by using an envelopment tactic which eliminated the Roman numerical advantage by shrinking the surface area where combat could occur. Hannibal drew up his least reliable infantry in the centre of a semicircle with the wings composed of the Gallic and Numidian horse. The Roman legions forced their way through Hannibal's weak centre but the Libyan Mercenaries on the wings swung around their advance, menacing their flanks. The onslaught of Hannibal's cavalry was irresistible, and Hasdrubal, his brother, who commanded the left, routed the Roman cavalry on the Roman right wing and then

swept around the rear of the Roman line and attacked Varro's cavalry on the Roman left, and then the legions, from behind. As a result, the Roman army was surrounded with no means of escape. Due to these brilliant tactics, Hannibal, with much inferior numbers, managed to destroy all but a small remnant of this force. Depending on the source, it is estimated that 50,000–70,000 Romans were killed or captured at Cannae.

As Polybius notes, *“How much more serious was the defeat of Cannae, than those which preceded it can be seen by the behaviour of Rome’s allies; before that fateful day, their loyalty remained unshaken, now it began to waver for the simple reason that they despaired of Roman power.”*^[13]

During that same year, the Greek cities in Sicily were induced to revolt against Roman political control, while the Macedonian king, Philip V pledged his support to Hannibal – thus initiating the First Macedonian War against Rome. Hannibal also secured an alliance with newly appointed King Hieronymus of Syracuse, and Tarentum also came over to him around that time. Hannibal now had the resources and personnel needed to launch a successful attack on the City of Rome. However, he was uncertain of the feasibility of such an attack and spent a great deal of time pondering it. While he hesitated, the Romans were able to regroup, and the opportunity was lost. The Romans looked back on Hannibal's indecision as what saved Rome from certain defeat. The only other notable event of 216 BC was the defection of Capua, the second largest city of Italy, which Hannibal made his new base. Yet even this defection failed to satisfy him as only a few of the Italian city-states which he had expected to gain as allies agreed to join him. Furthermore, the Macedonian navy was no match for the Roman navy, so they were unable to help him directly.



Opening and decisive phase of the Battle of Cannae, 216 BC. The Punic cavalry (made up of Gauls and Iberians) routed the much smaller Roman cavalry on the Roman right wing, then raced round the rear of the Roman line to attack from behind the Romans' allied Latin cavalry on the Roman left, who were already engaged with Hannibal's Numidian horse. The Latin cavalry was then destroyed. The victorious Punic cavalry were then free to attack the Roman infantry line from the rear. The battle confirmed the superiority of Hannibal's cavalry, in both numbers and training, over the Roman and Latin citizen levies. From this time, the Romans relied heavily on non-Italian allied cavalry and around the start of the 1st century BC legionary cavalry was abolished altogether

Hannibal sent a delegation to Rome to negotiate a peace and another one offering to release his Roman prisoners of war for ransom, but Rome rejected all offers.

Establishing an allied base

“I have not come to fight Italians, but on behalf of the Italians against Rome.”

Livy, Hannibal after the battle of Lake Trasimene

After Cannae several south Italian allies went at once over to Hannibal: the Apulian towns of Salapia,

Arpi and Herdonia and many of the Lucanians. Mago marched south with an army detachment and some weeks later the Bruttians joined him. Simultaneously, Hannibal marched north with part of his forces and was joined by the Hirpini and the Caudini, two of the three Samnite cantons. The greatest gain was the second largest city of Italy, Capua, when Hannibal's army marched into Campania in 216 BC. The inhabitants of Capua held limited Roman citizenship and the aristocracy was linked to the Romans via marriage and friendship, but the possibility of becoming the supreme city of Italy after the evident Roman disasters proved too strong a temptation. The treaty between them and Hannibal can be described as an agreement of friendship since the Capuans had no obligations, but provided the harbour through which Hannibal was reinforced.^[14] By 215 BC Hannibal's alliance system covered the bulk of southern Italy, save for the Greek cities along the coast (except Croton that was conquered by his allies), Rhegium, and the Latin colonies Beneventum, Luceria in Samnium, Venusia in Apulia, Brundisium and Paestum. The independent Gaul he had established in northern Italy was still out of Roman control.^[15]

Hannibal had been able to win over a major allied base by his tremendous military success. He also regarded it as essential to take the city of Nola, a Roman fortress in Campania, a region that linked his various allies geographically and contained his most important harbour for supply. Prior to his first attempt the pro-Punic faction in the city had been eliminated by the Romans, so there was no chance of the city being betrayed. Hannibal tried three times, by assault or siege, to take this city, which was defended by Marcus Claudius Marcellus in the battle of Nola (216 BC), Battle of Nola (215 BC) and battle of Nola (214 BC), but failed each time. At least in 215 Hannibal was able to take Casilinum, the other important site for controlling Campania.

While it was not directly connected with the Italian peninsula, Syracuse on Sicily was important for securing the searoutes for supply, since Lilybaeum remained in Roman hands. Hannibal was aided by the fact that Hiero II, the old tyrant of Syracuse and a staunch Roman ally, had died and his successor Hieronymus was discontented with his position in the Roman alliance. Hannibal dispatched two of his lieutenants, who were of Syracusan origin; they succeeded in winning Syracuse over, at the price, however, of making the whole of Sicily a Syracusan possession. The



A well-preserved stretch of the Via Appia, the first major Roman road in Italy. Construction was launched under the censor Appius Claudius in 312 BC and continued in stages until 269 BC when it reached its final destination, the port of Brundisium. It was the road used by Rome's armies, including Fabius', to reach Hannibal in S. Italy 216-203 BC



Trace of the Via Appia imposed on a satellite picture of southern Italy, showing the location of many of the Greek cities fought over by Hannibal and the Romans. The original Via Appia is in white. The alternative road (in pink) was constructed 400 years later under emperor Trajan (ruled 98-117). But the route was already a busy one in Hannibal's time and repeatedly used by him

Syracusans' ambitions were great, but the army they fielded was no match for the arriving Roman force, leading to the siege of Syracuse from 214 BC onwards. During this siege the ingenuity of Archimedes' machines defeated all Roman attacks.

The essence of Hannibal's campaign in Italy was to fight the Romans with indigenous resources. His subordinate Hanno was able to raise troops in Samnium, but the Romans intercepted these new levies in the Battle of Beneventum (214 BC) and eliminated them before they came under the feared leadership of Hannibal. Hannibal could win allies, but defending them against the Romans was a new and difficult problem, as the Romans could still field multiple armies greatly outnumbering his own forces. Thus Fabius was able to take the Punic ally Arpi in 213 BC.

Eastern Mediterranean and Ionian Sea (218 BC - 213 BC)

217 letter from Hannibal after Battle of Lake Trasimene leading to war preparations 217–216 BC
Philip V of Macedon building a fleet of 100 lembi 216 BC ambassadors to Hannibal after Battle of Cannae 214 Second Macedonian War officially starts 214 naval expeditions from Macedonia 213 land expedition to Lissus

Rome takes key cities (212 BC - 207 BC)

Western Mediterranean(212 BC - 207 BC)

Defeat of the first expedition

In Iberia, the Scipio brothers had hired 20,000 Celtiberian mercenaries to reinforce their army of 30,000 foot and 3,000 horse. Observing that the Carthaginian armies were deployed separately from each other, with Hasdrubal Barca and 15,000 troops near Amtorgis, and Mago Barca, Hasdrubal Gisco with 10,000 troops each further to the West of Hasdrubal, the Scipio brothers planned to split their forces. Publius Scipio decided to take 20,000 Roman and allied soldiers and attack Mago Barca near Castulo, while Gnaeus Scipio took one double legion (10,000 troops) and the mercenaries to attack Hasdrubal Barca. This stratagem would lead to 2 battles, the Battle of Castulo and the Battle of Ilorca to take place within a few days of each other, usually combined as Battle of the Upper Baetis (211 BC). Both battles ended in clear defeats for the Romans because Hasdrubal bribed the Roman mercenaries to desert and return home without a fight.



Scipio Africanus, portrait on a gold signet ring from Capua dating from around the time of the Second Punic War

As a result of the battle the Romans were forced to retreat to their stronghold of Northern Iberia from which the Carthaginians could not expel them. It is notable that the Roman soldiers decided to elect a new leader since both commanders had been killed, a practice hitherto known only in Punic or Hellenistic armies.

Second Roman expedition to Iberia

In 210 BC Scipio Aemelianus arrived in Iberia on the Senate's orders to avenge his father and uncle. In the Battle of Baecula (208 BC) he defeated Hasdrubal, but was not able to prevent him from

continuing his march to Italy in order to reinforce his brother Hannibal. In a brilliant assault Scipio succeeded in capturing the centre of Punic power in Iberia, Cartagena, in 207 BC. Battle of Cartagena (207 BC)

Central Mediterranean (212 BC - 207 BC)

Climax and fall of Hannibal's alliance

The climax of Carthaginian expansion was reached when the biggest Greek city in Italy, Tarentum, switched sides in 212 BC. The Battle of Tarentum (212 BC) was a carefully planned coup by Hannibal and members of the city's democratic faction. There were two separate successful assaults on the gates of the city. This enabled the Punic army, which had approached unobserved behind a screen of marauding Numidian horsemen, to enter the city by surprise and take all but the citadel where the Romans and their supporting faction were able to rally. The Carthaginians failed to take the citadel, but subsequent fortifications around this enemy stronghold enabled the city to remain under Punic control. However, the harbour was blocked and warships had to be transported overland to be launched at sea.



Coin issued by the city of Tarentum during the period of Hannibal's control circa 212-208 B.C. showing (obverse) youth on horseback and (reverse) boy riding dolphin, the traditional symbol of Tarentine coins. Note the legend TAPAZ (TARAS) the Greek name for the city. Silver *didrachm*

The Battle of Capua (212 BC) was a stalemate since neither side could defeat the other. The Romans decided to withdraw and break off the siege of Capua. As a result the cavalry of Capua was reinforced with half of the available Numidian cavalry, 2,000 riders.

In the battle of Beneventum (212 BC) Hanno the Elder was again defeated, this time by Quintus Fulvius Flaccus who also captured his camp.

Next came the Battle of the Silarus in 212 BC, where the Romans under Marcus Centenius were ambushed and lost all but 1,000 of their 16,000 effectives.

The Battle of Herdonia (212 BC) was another Roman defeat when only 2,000 Romans out of force of 18,000 survived a direct attack by Hannibal's numerically superior forces combined with an ambush cutting off the Roman line of retreat.

This phase of the war was marked by the fall of major and minor cities to the Romans, although Hannibal was still able to prevail on the battlefield and thus lift some sieges.

The Siege of Syracuse (214–212 BC) from 214 BC onwards was marked by Archimedes' ingenuity in inventing war machines that made it impossible for the Romans to make any gains with traditional methods of siege warfare. A Carthaginian army of 20,000 had been sent to relieve the city, but suffered more heavily than the Romans from pestilence and was thus forced to retreat to Agrigentum. The fall of Syracuse was finally achieved by a Roman attack that was treacherously helped to enter the city by a Syracusan pro-Roman faction and resulted in the death of Archimedes.



Ancient Greek tomb at Syracuse, Sicily, believed to be that of Archimedes (with decorative lintel)

In the Battle of Capua (211 BC) Hannibal again tried to relieve his main harbour as in 212 BC by luring the Romans into a pitched battle. He was unsuccessful, and was also unable to lift the siege by assaulting the besiegers' defences. So he tried a strategem of staging a march towards Rome, hoping in this way to compel the enemy to abandon the siege and rush to defend their home city. However, only part of the besieging force left for Rome and under continued siege Capua fell soon afterwards. Near Rome he fought another pitched battle.

The Battle of Herdonia (210 BC) was another battle to lift the Roman siege of an allied city. Hannibal caught the proconsul Gnaeus Fulvius Centumalus off guard during his siege of Herdonia and destroyed his army in a pitched battle with up to 13,000 Romans dead out of less than 20,000.

The defection of Salapia in Apulia in 210 BC was achieved by treachery: the inhabitants massacred the Numidian garrison and went over to the Romans.

In 210 BC the Battle of Numistro between Marcellus and Hannibal was inconclusive, but the Romans stayed on his heels until the also inconclusive Battle of Canusium in 209 BC. In the meantime, this battle enabled another Roman army under Fabius to approach Tarentum and take it by treachery in the Battle of Tarentum (209 BC). Hannibal at that time had been able to disengage from Marcellus and was only 5 miles away when the city, under the command of Carthalo (who was bound to Fabius by an agreement of hospitality), fell.

Hasdrubal's failed reinforcement

The Battle of Grumentum was an inconclusive fight in 207 BC between Gaius Claudius Nero and Hannibal. In the aftermath of the battle Nero was able to trick Hannibal into believing that the whole Roman army was still in camp. In the meantime Nero marched with a selected corps north and reinforced the Romans there to fight the Battle of the Metaurus against Hasdrubal. The Carthaginian force under Hasdrubal had left Iberia a year ago after the defeat at the Battle of Baecula and had been reinforced by Gallic and Ligurian mercenaries and allies. It is notable that they took the same route as Hannibal 10 years previously, but suffered less casualties, being rather better supported by mercenaries from the mountain tribes.

Naval raids and expeditions

210 BC: Second expedition to Sardinia. Naval expedition to Tarentum. Roman raids on Africa.

Eastern Mediterranean and Ionian Sea (212 BC - 207 BC)

211 Rome counters Macedonian threat with a Greek alliance of the Aetolians, Elis, Sparta, Messenia and Attalus I of Pergamon, as well as two Roman clients, the Illyrians Pleuratus and Scerdilaidas.^[16]

209 Illyri attack on Macedonia 209 Punic naval expedition to Corcyra 209 First Battle of Lamia 209



A section of Rome's Servian Wall at Termini railway station. Although named after Servius Tullius, a legendary 6th century Roman king, the wall was originally built in 378 BC (acc. to Livy). But archaeologists believe it was greatly strengthened in the 3rd century BC. Built of massive tuff stone blocks, it was originally 10m high (6m survive in the piece above) and 4m thick. Circumference: 11km. It was this wall that dissuaded Hannibal from attempting a direct attack on Rome

Second Battle of Lamia 208 BC Roman and Pergamese attack on Lemnos

Seeking peace (206 BC - 201 BC)

Western Mediterranean(206 BC - 201 BC)

Carthage's last stand in Iberia

At the Battle of Ilipa large numbers of Celtiberian mercenaries in Carthaginian service confronted a mixed army of Romans and Iberians. Scipio Africanus Major employed a clever ruse. Every day for several days, he drew up his army for battle with the Romans stationed in the centre of the line and their Iberian on the wings. But when the enemy offered battle, he would eventually decline it. By this stratagem he convinced the Punic commanders Mago and Hasdrubal Gisco that they could expect the Romans to hold the centre of their line. On the day of the battle the Roman force deployed earlier in the day and with the Romans posted on the wings of the line. In the rush to respond, the Carthaginians placed their best forces in the centre as usual, failing to spot the unusual Roman deployment. Thus the inferior Carthaginian mercenaries on the wings were severely beaten by the Romans. The Celtiberians deserted the Carthaginian camp that night. This catastrophic defeat sealed the fate of the Carthaginian presence in Iberia. It was followed by the Roman capture of Gades in 206 BC after the city had already rebelled against Carthaginian rule. A last attempt was made by Mago in 205 BC to recapture New Carthage while the Roman presence was shaken by a mutiny and an Iberian uprising against their new overlords. But the attack was repulsed. So in the same year he left Iberia, setting sail from the Balearic islands to Italy with his remaining forces.

The Numidian struggle

206 BC there was a quick succession of kings in Eastern Numidia that temporarily ended with the division of the land between Carthage and the Western Numidian king Syphax, a former Roman ally. For this bargain Syphax was to marry Sophonisba, daughter of Hasdrubal Gisco. Massinissa, who had thus lost his fiancée went over to the Romans with whom he had already established contact during his military service in Iberia.

Central Mediterranean(206 BC - 201 BC)

Last stands in Italy

205 Mago lands in Italy 205 Mago is defeated in the Po Valley
Raid 204 Battle of Crotona 203 Battle of Crotona

Carrying the war to Africa

Scipio Africanus Major was given command of the legions in Sicily and was allowed to levy volunteers for his plan to end the war by an invasion of Africa. The legions in Sicily were mainly the survivors of Cannae who were not allowed home until the war was finished. Scipio was also one of the survivors and had served during the siege of Syracuse with them, but unlike the ordinary



Tomb of the Numidian king Massinissa (c.238-c.148 BC). Massinissa, leader of the Massyli Berber tribe, was originally an ally of Carthage and fought against the Romans in Iberia. But after the Battle of Ilipa in 206 BC, he switched sides. His support at the Battle of Zama was critical to the Roman victory. Massinissa remained a staunch Roman ally for the rest of his long life. Site: Shoumaa el-Khroub, near Constantine, Algeria

soldiers he then had been allowed home, had run successfully for public office and had been given command of the troops in Iberia.

Within a year of his landing in Africa, Scipio twice routed the regular Carthaginian forces under Hasdrubal Gisco and his Numidian allies. The main native supporter of the Carthaginians, king Syphax of the Massaesylians (western Numidians), was defeated and taken prisoner. Masinissa, a Numidian rival of Syphax and at that time an ally of the Romans, seized a large part of his kingdom with their help. These setbacks persuaded some of the Carthaginians that it was time to sue for peace. Others pleaded for the recall of the sons of Hamilcar Barca, Hannibal and Mago, who were still fighting the Romans in Bruttium and Cisalpine Gaul respectively.

In 203 BC, while Scipio was carrying all before him in Africa and the Carthaginian peace party were arranging an armistice, Hannibal was recalled from Italy by the war party at Carthage. After leaving a record of his expedition engraved in Punic and Greek upon bronze tablets in the temple of Juno at Crotona, he sailed back to Africa. These records were later quoted by Polybius. Hannibal's arrival immediately restored the predominance of the war party, who placed him in command of a combined force of African levies and his mercenaries from Italy. But Hannibal was opposed to this policy and tried to convince them not to send the untrained African levies into battle. In 202 BC, Hannibal met Scipio in a peace conference. Despite the two generals' mutual admiration, negotiations floundered, according to the Romans due to "Punic faith", meaning bad faith. This Roman expression referred to the alleged breach of protocols which ended the First Punic War by the Carthaginian attack on Saguntum, Hannibal's perceived breaches of the idealised Roman military etiquette (i.e. Hannibal's numerous ambushes), as well as the armistice violated by the Carthaginians in the period before Hannibal's return.

203 Battle of Utica (203 BC) 203 Battle of the Great Plains 203 Battle of Cirta

Broken armistice and final peace treaty

The decisive battle soon followed. Unlike most battles of the Second Punic War, the Romans had superiority in cavalry and the Carthaginians had superiority in infantry. The Roman army was generally better armed and a head taller than the Carthaginian. Hannibal had refused to lead this army into battle because he did not expect them to be able to stand their ground. There had been very bitter arguments between him and the oligarchy. His co-general Hasdrubal Gisco was forced to commit suicide by a violent mob after he spoke in support of Hannibal's view that such troops should not be led into battle. Before the battle Hannibal gave no speech to his new troops, only to his veterans. The new troops proved as cowardly and inexperienced as he had expected.

The Roman cavalry won an early victory, and Scipio had devised tactics for defeating Carthaginian war elephants. However, the battle remained closely fought, and at one point it seemed that Hannibal was on the verge of victory. However, Scipio was able to rally his men, and his cavalry attacked Hannibal's rear. This two-pronged attack caused the Carthaginian formation to disintegrate and collapse. After their defeat, Hannibal convinced the Carthaginians to accept peace. Notably, he broke the rules of the assembly by forcibly removing a speaker who supported continued resistance. Afterwards he was obliged to apologize for his behaviour.

202 Battle of Zama

Eastern Mediterranean and Ionian Sea (206 BC - 201 BC)

206 the Aetolians make peace with Macedonia 205 Rome lands with 11,000 men and 35 ships in Durrës but achieve no military objective 205 The First Macedonian war ends with the peace Treaty of Phoenice.

Rome and Carthage after the war

Carthage lost Hispania forever, and it was reduced to a client state. A war indemnity of 10,000 talents was imposed, her navy was limited to 10 ships to ward off pirates, and she was forbidden from raising an army without Rome's permission. The Numidians took the opportunity to capture and plunder Carthaginian territory. Half a century later, when Carthage raised an army to defend itself from these incursions, it was destroyed by Rome in the Third Punic War. Rome on the other hand, by her victory, had taken a key step towards domination of the Mediterranean world.

The end of the war was not universally welcomed in Rome, for reasons of both politics and morale. When the Senate decreed upon a peace treaty with Carthage, Quintus Caecilius Metellus, a former consul, said he did not look upon the termination of the war as a blessing to Rome, since he feared that the Roman people would now sink back again into its former slumbers, from which it had been roused by the presence of Hannibal. (Valerius Maximus vii. 2. §3.). Others, most notably Cato the Elder, feared that if Carthage was not completely destroyed it would soon regain its power and pose new threats to Rome, and pressed for harsher peace conditions. Even after the peace, Cato insisted on the destruction of Carthage, ending his speeches with *Carthago delenda est* ("*Carthage must be destroyed*"), even if his speech had nothing to do with Carthage.^[17]

Archeology has discovered that the famous circular military harbour at Carthage, the Cothon, received a significant buildup after this war. It could house and quickly deploy about 200 triremes, and was shielded from external sight. This is a surprising development, as after the war, the Carthaginian fleet was restricted to only ten triremes as one of the terms of surrender. One possible explanation: as has been pointed out for other Phoenician cities, privateers with warships played a significant role besides trade, even when the Roman Empire was fully established and officially controlled all coasts. In this case it is not clear whether the treaty included private warships. The only reference to Punic privateers is from the First Punic War: one of them, Hanno the Rhodian, owned a quinquireme (faster than the serial production models which the Romans had copied), manned with about 500 men and then among the heaviest warships in use. Later pirates in Roman waters are all reported with much smaller vessels, that could outrun naval vessels, but operated with lower personnel costs. Thus, piracy was probably highly developed in Carthage and the state did not have a monopoly of military forces. Pirates probably played an important role in capturing slaves, one of the most profitable trade goods, but merchant ships with tradeable goods and a crew were also their targets. There is no source about the fate of Punic privateers in the periods between the Punic Wars.

Hannibal became a businessman for several years and later enjoyed a leadership role in Carthage.



Aerial view (1958) of Carthage's cothon-type military harbour. The circular naval base was situated on the central peninsula. The entrance to the harbour has silted up



Scale model of the circular naval base at Carthage. Note the individual docking bays for warships

However, the Carthaginian nobility was upset by his policy of democratisation and struggle against corruption. They persuaded the Romans to force him into exile in Asia Minor, where he again led armies against the Romans and their allies on the battlefield. He eventually committed suicide to avoid capture.

Carthage and Numidia after the war

Between Carthage and Numidia there was constant low-level warfare, but by the time of the Third Punic War, most of Carthage's African territories had been lost and the Numidians traded independently with Greeks.

Primary sources

Livy, Polybius, Appian

See also

- Hannibal Barca
- Scipio Africanus Major
- War elephants
- Barcid
- List of battles of the Second Punic War
- Polybius wrote a detailed history, showing contemporary insight into the political process of this time.
- Silius Italicus, who dramatised the war in his poem *Punica*
- Petrarch, who wrote an epic on the war entitled *Africa*
- Plutarch's Lives for lives of two of the Roman generals, Fabius Maximus and Gaius Flaminius. Plutarch's life of Scipio Africanus is lost.

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External links

- Polybius History (<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Polybius/home.html>)

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